

## FILM CLIPS NEWS FROM THE MONTANA FILM OFFICE

# Montana Big Sky Film Grant: New media, new program

Film incentives have become the name of the game, but not everyone, it seems, is willing to stop there. Two years ago, Montana Film Commissioner Deny Staggs made a decision to take state support of production ventures to a whole new level.

Enter the Montana Department of Commerce's Big Sky Film Grant (BSFG). The multi-tiered grant program that offers assistance in the development and sustainability of Montana production and media entities has allowed for innovation and leveraging of Montana-centric content on an unprecedented scale.

"The inspiration to create a grant program was centered in my desire to encourage more Montana-centric stories and production to occur in the state. The overall film industry has shifted away from location-based productions to business-based productions that look at incentives over location," Staggs explained. "I wanted to reward productions that valued Montana as a location and a central element in the story."

Partnering with leadership at both the Montana Department of Commerce and the Montana Office of Tourism, Staggs came to the conclusion that for the film grant to see success and offer the best opportunities to the Montana media community, the Montana



YouTube's power is beginning to redefine traditional media barriers.

Film Office needed a partner. It didn't take long to decide on the most ubiquitous video platform in the world today: YouTube.

A swirl of commercial productions, amateur films, movie trailers, video game streams, and (of course) adorable cat videos, YouTube has become the leading source for video on demand in the world. With more than one in three people actively searching for video content on the site daily, Staggs knew he had found his platform.

Now with the development grant portion of the BSFG, content producers may apply to create Montana-centric, web-based video content for one of three channels hosted by

producers in the state. From adventure videos on Epic Montana to the human-interest pieces of the Montana Experience to the film-focused content of Reel West Montana, the BSFG is providing new, engaging content to fans of Montana around the world.

Staggs has seen projects such as a travel docu-series called "Between the Parks," which follows young Montanans as they trek from Yellowstone to Glacier, to completely immersive trans-media projects such as "The Orphan Girl," a partnership with Headframe Spirits revolving around the ground swell of new innovation and pioneer spirit of Butte.

As YouTube stars such as Jenna Marbles and Hannah Hart begin translating their internet success into real-world (and multi-million dollar) production, it's clear that YouTube's power is beginning to redefine traditional media barriers.

But what of Montana? Is there room for the Big Sky State under that bright red banner? Staggs is far from worried.

"The Montana Brand has a very high value. Consumers are really enamored with Montana's authenticity and uniqueness." He assures viewers, "Our Montana-based producers have the best vantage point of this and can look within their own circle to craft a great story."

## LITERARY LANDSCAPE

# Writing classes for kids and adults in Eastern Montana

By Charity Dewing

The Big Sky Writing Workshops (BSWW) in Billings offers courses and one-day workshops in fiction, poetry, nonfiction and playwriting, as well as courses on the novel-in-progress, writing and the environment, writing the scene, creative journaling, performing poetry, overcoming writer's block, and more. All of the classes are taught by authors, poets, and writing professors in a supportive atmosphere, allowing creativity to thrive.

Author Craig Lancaster teaches classes on self-publication and character development. Lancaster, who has successfully self-published two books, says experience is the best knowledge he can pass on to his students.

"I was able to share some specialized knowledge I have about an emerging trend in publishing, and it was a chance to talk craft in an area that's really important to me as a novelist," he reflects. "What we can do is share things that have aided in our success and perhaps point prospective writers in a direction that gives them better, more focused work habits."

"To the extent that an energetic workshop can jump-start someone's willingness to do the hard work of getting better, that's a real benefit," he adds.

For writers specifically looking for feedback from fellow aspirants, the Writers' Circle is a program that focuses on peer critique rather than direct instruction. Facilitated by a BSWW faculty member, students read each other's works-in-progress and offer constructive feedback.

Author and instructor Danell Jones says the workshops are aimed toward beginner and dedicated writers. "We offer courses ranging from introductory workshops designed with the novice writer in mind to advanced seminars, created especially for more seasoned writers who want to take their work to the next level," she says.

"The classes help aspiring writers to know they are not alone. They can also learn valuable techniques that can make their poems more powerful, create suspense in their stories, overcome writer's block, get their writing published, take their work to the next level, and much more," she adds.



Students in Arts without Boundaries study poetry.

For more information, visit [www.bigsky-writingworkshops.com](http://www.bigsky-writingworkshops.com)

### Arts without Boundaries

For younger aspiring writers and poets, Arts without Boundaries is offering a series of 12-week, hour-long, in-class instruction days, provided by guest writers. "The writers work to engage students and create a lifelong interest in reading and writing," says instructor Malia Burgess Halstvedt.

Writing, believes Halstvedt, is an incredibly valuable and needed art to incorporate into the classroom and children's lives. "We'd like them to realize the power that lies in producing work that will make other people smile, laugh, cry," she says. "I have absolutely held back tears in the classroom in the past, where the poems produced were sometimes beyond hilarity or achingly painful – sometimes even in the same poem."

In many ways, writing is often therapeutic, building confidence that can translate into other academics. "Our writing program is a very positive one," says Halstvedt. "We want to help young people view writing

with joy, encourage them to play with words and images, and to express themselves on paper."

She also believes writing skills can help with other academic pursuits by building word recognition, syntax, semantics, discourse, and socialization. "Creative writing, in particular, can aid development of phonemic awareness while enhancing vocabulary, fluency, and expression," she says.

Halstvedt has seen, first hand, children afraid to write a single word flourish into confident poets. "Children need every avenue possible to express their feelings, to write about what makes them cry and laugh and sing," she says. "Writing provides that important avenue, and hopefully helps them build up their writing and reading – for pleasure! – muscle."

Arts without Boundaries offers this program free to every school in Billings. "We are expanding into 13 classrooms this year, up from four last year," says Halstvedt. "Eventually, we would like to be in every classroom in Billings."

Learn more at [artswithoutboundaries.org](http://artswithoutboundaries.org).

### Film office offers tips

Want tips on how to get hired on a film production or shooting a film in Montana?

The Montana Film Office has an informative list of suggestions. Call the office at 406-841-2876; e-mail requests to [montanafilm@visitmt.com](mailto:montanafilm@visitmt.com) or visit the website: [www.montanafilm.com](http://www.montanafilm.com).

The website includes information on crews and services and films now hiring, as well as a sign-up for the MFO e-newsletter and access to a mobile app.

## MONTANA POET LAUREATE

### A Colander of Barley

By Tami Haaland

From *When We Wake in the Night*

The smell, once water has rinsed it, is like a field of ripe grain. Or the grain held in a truck, and if you climb the steel side, one foot lodged on the hubcap, the other on the wheel, and pull your body upward, your hands holding to tarp hooks, and lift toes onto the metal box, rest your ribs against the side, you will see beetles and grasshoppers among the hulled kernels. Water stirs and resurrects harvest dust: sun beating on abundance, the moist heat of grain collected in steel, hands plunging and lifting, the grain spilling back.

